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We have done with the kisses that sting,
The thief's mouth red from the feast,
The blood on the hands of the king,
And the lie at the lips of the priest.

—Swinburne

Is the Morality of Jesus Sound?

A Lecture Delivered Before
the Independent Religious
Society, Orchestra Hall,
Chicago, Sunday, at 11 A. M.



By
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I make war against this theological instinct: I have found traces of it everywhere. Whoever has theological blood in his veins is, from the very beginning, ambiguous and disloyal with respect to everything.....I have digged out the theologist instinct everywhere; it is the most diffused, the most peculiarly SUBTERRANEAN form of falsity that exists on earth. What a theologian feels as true, MUST needs be false: one has therein almost a criterion of truth.

—Nietzsche.

Is the Moral Teaching of Jesus Sound?

A great deal depends upon the answer to the question, "Is the moral teaching of Jesus sound?" This question brings us to the inner and most closely guarded citadel of Christianity. If it can be captured, the rout of supernaturalism will be complete; but as long as it stands, Christianity can afford to lose every one of its outer fortifications, and still be the victor. Reason may drive supernaturalism out of the Catholic position into the Protestant, and out of that, into the Unitarian, and out of that again into Liberalism, but reason does not become master of the field until it has stormed and razed to the ground this last and greatest of all the strongholds—the morality of Christianity.

If Jesus was the author of perfect or even the highest ideals the world has ever cherished, he will, and must, remain the saviour, *par excellence*, of the world. Whether he was man or God, which question Unitarianism discusses, is a trifling matter. If his ethical teaching is practically without a flaw, I would gladly call him God, and more, if such a thing were possible. His walking on the water, or his raising the dead, or his flying through the air, would not in the least embarrass me. I could accept them all—if he rose morally head and shoulders above every other mortal or immortal, our world has ever produced. It is claimed that he did. What is the evidence?

To facilitate this discussion, and to concentrate all our attention on the subject of this discourse, we will waive the question of the historicity of Jesus. For the sake of argument, we will accept the gospels as history—accept the authenticity of the documents, the trustworthiness of the witnesses, and the inspiration of the texts which we are to quote. We

will grant every point; concede every claim, allow every contention of the defendants. We will then say to them: Does the evidence which you have presented and we have accepted without raising any objections, prove that the moral teaching of Jesus is perfect, or even the highest the world has ever possessed?

A system of thought, or a code of morals, is much like a building. A serious crack in one of the walls, or a post that is not secure in its socket, is enough to make the whole building unsafe. When a building is condemned, it is not condemned for the parts that are sound, but for the part or parts that are unsound. To change my illustration, the strength of a chain is in its weakest link. So is the strength of a religion in its most vulnerable parts. By overlooking the weakness and dwelling solely upon the strong points, we could make any religion appear as the best in the world; as a similar bias would prove the most rickety building even perfectly safe. A lawyer, an advocate, or special pleader, may conceal, or cover up the cracks in the walls of a building, or the defects of an institution. But why should I? My object is not to save the building, but the people who are in it. I am not interested in saving the creed or the religion, but the people who stake their lives on it. I am not trying to earn my fee, I am trying to serve the people. Why should I, then, be expected to spread the mantle of charity over a building that deserves to be condemned, or plead for a religion that blocks the path of advancement? And why,—why should any religion beg for charity? To a cashier of a bank, to a treasurer of a corporation, to an official of the municipality or the state, who should beg the examining committee not to look into all his dealings, but only to report what good they can of him, we say: "You are guilty." Not only that, but he is also trying to make us his accomplices.

Lawyer-like, preachers often tell their hearers to see only the good in the bible, for instance. "When you are eating fish," they say, "you eat the meat and throw away the bones. Do the same with the bible." But why should anything in the bible be meant to be thrown away? Pardon me if I use a stronger expression—why should any part of the Word of God be destined for the garbage box?

It is a pleasure, and it confirms us in our optimism, to admit that in all the religions of the world, even in the crudest, there is much that is good, as in every structure or dwelling there are rooms and walls and posts that are perfectly sound. Religions live, as buildings endure,—by the soundness there is in them. It is not the cracked wall or damaged pillar which supports the building—it is the sound parts that keep it together. The same is true of religions. It is the truths they contain that preserve them. Mohammedanism, for instance, has survived for nearly fifteen centuries, and its survival is due to the virtues and not to the vices of the Mohammedan faith. This is equally true of Judaism and Christianity. If human Society has survived for these many centuries, it is because, imperfect as it is, there is enough of justice and honor among men to keep it from disintegration. But is that any reason why we should be content with what little justice or truth there is in the world, and not strive for more? And shall we hold our tongues on the terrible injustice and oppression all around us simply because there is also goodness and virtue among men? Simply because the human race keeps going as it is, shall we not endeavor to improve it? And because there is some good in all religions, shall we shut our eyes to the dangerous fallacies they contain? Is it not our duty as well as our privilege to labor for a more rational and a more ennobling faith?

In the teachings attributed to Jesus, whose nativity is celebrated to-day ⁽¹⁾ in Europe and America, there is much that we are in cordial sympathy with. We can say the same of all the founders of religions. If any one were to point out to us passages of beauty in the four evangels, I for myself would gladly agree to all that may be said in their praise. But if I were asked to infer from these isolated passages that the ethical teaching of Jesus is not only the most perfect within human reach, but also sufficient to the needs of man for all time, I would deem it a stern duty to combat the proposition with all the earnestness at my command. It would then be the duty, indeed, of every one to denounce the attempt to arrest the progress of the world by holding it bound to the thought of one man. In the interest of morality itself, it must be shown

(1) Christmas Sunday, Dec. 26, 1909.

that Jesus is not the highest product of the ages, nor is he the best that the future can promise. There is room beyond Jesus. But not only was Jesus not the perfect teacher his worshippers claim him to have been, but there are flaws in his system—cracks and rents in the walls of his temple—so serious and menacing, that not to call attention to them would be to shirk the most urgent service we owe to the cause of humanity.

My first general criticism of the morality of Jesus is, that it lacks universality. It is not meant for all peoples and all times. It is rather the morality of a sect, a coterie, or a secret society. I object to the provincialism of Jesus. Jesus was not a cosmopolite. He was a Hebrew before he was a man. If we find Jerusalem on the map of the world and draw a circle around it,—covering the rest of the map with our hands,—we will then have before us all the world that Jesus knew anything about,—or cared for. Little did he think of the rest of the world. The continents of Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, and the, as yet, undiscovered America, had no place whatever either in his thought or affection. The yellow millions of China and Japan, the dusky millions of Hindustan, the blacks of Africa with their galling chains, the white races with the most pressing problems which ever taxed the brain of man—do not seem to have deserved even a passing notice from Jesus. It is quite evident that such a country as our America, for instance, with its nearly one hundred millions of people of all races and religions, dwelling under the same flag, and governing themselves without a King or a Caesar, never crossed the orbit even of his imagination. Is it reasonable to go to a provincial of this description for *universal* ideals?

What Jesus has in mind is not humanity, but a particular race. Israel is the nation that monopolizes his attention, and even in that nation his interest is limited to those that believe in him as the Messiah. The idea of a world-salvation was utterly foreign to his sympathies. His disciples were all of one race, and he emphatically warned them against going into the cities of the Gentiles to preach the gospel. He tells them that he was sent expressly and exclusively for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Of course, we are familiar with the "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," but Jesus is supposed to have given that command-

ment after his *death*. In his life time, he said, "Go not into the cities and towns of the Gentiles." If he said, "Go *not*, to the Gentiles!" when he was living, the "Go to the Gentiles," after his death, has all the ear-marks of an interpolation. The two statements squarely contradict each other. Granting that Jesus knew what he was talking about, he could not have given both commandments. Moreover, from the conduct of the apostles who refused to go to the Gentiles until Paul came about,—who had never seen or heard Jesus,—it may be concluded that Jesus did not change his mind to the very last on the matter of his being sent "only for the lost children of the House of Israel."

But the thought of Jesus is as Hebraic as are his sympathies. His God is invariably the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Suppose he had also called God, "The God of Abraham, Confucius and Socrates." Ah, if Jesus had only said that! The idea of the larger God was in the human mind, but not in his. The idea was in the air, but Jesus was not tall enough to reach it. He did not look beyond a tribal Deity. The God of Jesus was a Hebrew. To Jesus David was the only man who looked big in history. Of Alexander, for example, who conquered the world and made the Greek language universal—the language in which his own story, the story of Jesus, is written, and which story, in all probability would never have come down to us but for the Greek language and Alexander; of Socrates, whose daily life was the beauty of Athens; of Aristotle, of whom Goethe said that he was the greatest intellect the world had produced; of the Caesars, who converted a pirate station on the Tiber to an Eternal City—Jesus does not seem to have heard at all—and if he had, he does not seem to care for them, any more than would a Gypsy Smith.

The heaven of Jesus is also quite Semitic. His twelve apostles are to sit upon twelve thrones—to judge the *twelve tribes of Israel*. There is no mention of anybody else sitting on a throne, or of anybody else in heaven except Jews. People will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south to meet their father, Abraham, in heaven. The cosmography or topography of the world to come is also Palestinian. It has as many gates as there are sons of Jacob; all its

inhabitants have Hebrew names; and just as on earth, outside of Judea, the whole world was *heathen*, in the next world, heaven is where Abraham and his children dwell; the rest is *hell*. Indeed, to Jesus heaven meant Abraham's bosom. And we repeatedly come across the phrase, "heavenly Jerusalem" in the New Testament, as the name of the abode of the blessed? Is it likely that a man so racial, so sectarian, so circumscribed in his thought and sympathies,—so local and clannish,—could assume and fulfill the role of a universal teacher?

But not only was the world of Jesus a mere speck on the map, but it was also a world without a future. Jesus expected the world to come to an end in a very short time. And what was the use of trying to get acquainted with, or interested in, a world about to be abandoned? The evidence is very conclusive that Jesus believed the end of the world to be imminent. He says: "Verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel before the son of man come." As Palestine was a small country, and its few cities could easily be visited in a short time, it follows that Jesus expected the almost immediate end of the world. In another text he tells his disciples that this great event would happen in the lifetime of those who were listening to him: "This generation," he says, "shall not pass away," before the world ends. This belief in the approaching collapse of the world was shared by his apostles. Paul, for instance, is constantly exhorting Christians to get ready for the great catastrophe, and he describes how those still living will be transformed when Jesus appears in the clouds.

The earliest Christian Society was communistic, because all that they needed was enough to subsist upon before Jesus reappeared. It would have been foolish from their point of view to "lay up treasures on earth" when the earth was soon to be burnt up. Moreover, they were not commanded to labor, but to "watch and pray." The fruits of labor require time to ripen in, and there was no time. The cry was, "Behold the bridegroom is at the door." Hence, to "watch and pray" was the only reasonable occupation. We can see for ourselves how this belief in the near end of the world would create a kind of morality altogether unsuitable to people living in a world that does not come to an end. Jesus never dreamt that the

world was going to last, for at least another two thousand years. If anyone had whispered such a thing in his ears, he would have gasped for breath. Could the curtain of the future have been lifted high enough for Jesus to have seen in advance some of the changes that have come upon the world during the past twenty centuries,—the fall of the Roman Empire, the rise of Mohammedanism,—carrying two continents and throwing the third into a state of panic,—wresting the very Jerusalem of Jesus from the Christians and holding it for a thousand years; had Jesus been able to foresee the Dark Ages, the Italian Renaissance, the German Reformation, the French Revolution, the American Revolution with its Declaration of Independence, and later on, its Emancipation Proclamation,—and finally, had Jesus caught even the most distant gleam of that magnificent and majestic Empire, the Empire of Science, with its peaceful reign and bloodless conquests, slowly and serenely climbing above the horizon, bringing to man such a hope as had never before entered his breast, and giving him the stars for eyes, and the wind for wings—had but a glimpse of all this crossed the vision of this Jerusalem youth, his conception of a world soon to be smashed would have appeared to him as the infantile fancy of a—well, what shall I say?—I shall not say of a fanatic, I shall not say, of an illiterate,—let me say—of an enthusiast. The morality of Jesus not only lacked universality, but it was also framed to fit a world under sentence of immediate destruction.

Jesus' doctrine of a passing world was born of his pessimism. The old, whether in years, or in spirit, as Shakespeare says, are always wishing "that the estate of the Sun were now undone." Weariness of life is a sign of exhaustion. The strong and the healthy love life. The young are not pessimists. Jesus had the disease of aged and effete Asia. He was not European in ardor or energy. He contemplated a passing panorama, a world crashing and tumbling into ruins all about him, with Oriental resignation. The groan of a dying world was music to him. He enjoyed the anticipation of calamity. The end of the world would put an end to effort and endeavor, both of which the Asiatic dislikes. To tell people that the world is coming to an end soon,—today, tomorrow, is not to kindle, but to extinguish hope; and without hope our world

would be darker even than if the sun were to be blotted out of the sky.

The objection against Christianity, as also against its parent, Judaism, is that it seeks to divert the attention of man from the work in hand to something visionary and distant. It was to direct men's thoughts to some other world that Jesus belittled this.

What are you doing, asks the preacher.

I am laboring for my daily bread.

Indeed! Have you not heard that Jesus said: "Labor not for the meat that perisheth?"

And what are *you* doing?

We are building a city.

What! Do you not know that it is written in the Word of God that, "Here we have no abiding City?"

And *you*—

I have married and have decided to share my life with the woman I love.

And have you not read in St. Paul's Epistles, says the preacher again, that they who are married neglect the things of the Lord?

And *you*?

We are laboring to improve the world we live in—to make it a little cleaner and sweeter.

But do you not know, asks the man of God, that the world will soon pass away,—that, as Jesus has foretold, the sun will turn black, the stars will fall, and the elements will be consumed in a general conflagration?

The effect of the teaching of both Judaism and Christianity is to incapacitate man for earnest work now and here. And what do these religions offer in place of the home, the love, the world, which they take away from us? Let us ask the priest:

Where then *is* our home?

Yonder!—and he points into space with his finger.

Where? In the clouds?

Higher.

In the stars?

Higher still.

In the ether?

No, higher yet, far, far away. You can not see it. You have to take my word for it.

And, unfortunately, so many of us *take his word for it*. And upon what terms will the priest condescend to pilot us to our invisible and aerial mansions? We must turn over to him now, our all,—mind, body and lands. The doctrine of a world hastening to destruction, while it has demoralized the people, it has enriched the churches. During the middle ages, and earlier, and also in more recent times, more than once the credulous public has been scared out of its possessions by the preachers of calamity. Jesus can not very well clear himself of responsibility for this, because, it was he who tried to hurry the people out of a world soon to be set on fire. When a young man asked Jesus' permission to go and bury his father, he was told to "Let the dead bury their dead." This was extraordinary advice to a son who wished to do his father a last service. But Jesus was consistent. The world was catching fire and there was no time to lose. The morality of Jesus was the morality of panic. He would not give people the time to think of anything else but their own salvation from the impending doom. This was Bunyan's interpretation of the spirit of Christianity, for he made *Christian*, the hero of his story, to flee at once from the city of destruction, leaving his wife and children, his neighbors and his country behind. The morality of panic!

That this superstition that the world was about to be destroyed influenced the whole teaching of Jesus, as well as depressed his spirits, will be seen by an examination of his famous Sermon on the Mount. Matthew and Luke give somewhat different reports of it. It is likely that Luke's is the less embellished, and therefore more representative of Jesus' real attitude toward life. In the third Gospel, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor." Matthew gives it as, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." If the first document had the latter form, it is not likely that a later copyist would drop the "in spirit," but if the earlier simply read, "Blessed are the poor," a later writer might find it convenient and necessary even, to soften it by adding the words "in spirit." In Luke there is nothing said about hungering after righteousness, it is merely, "Blessed are ye, that hunger now: for ye shall be filled." The drift of the Sermon

as given by Luke, which in all probability is nearer the original than that given by Matthew, and which is at any rate equally inspired, is to wean men from a world which is but a snare and a delusion, and to get them to cultivate other-worldliness. Let me quote a few of the beatitudes:

"Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh—

"Woe unto you that are full; for ye shall hunger.

"Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep." (1)

And the next world according to Jesus was not really a better world, but the reverse of this. Some are hungry now, some are full. In the world of Jesus, those who are full now, will be hungry, and those who are hungry now will be full. Here Lazarus is suffering, and Dives is in comfort; there, they will change places. That is not a world worth looking forward to. It is not even a *new* world, but the old world turned about and actually made much worse. The suffering, the misery, the pain, in the world, now, are at least temporary, but there, they will be *eternal*. Here, the rich man, at least, gives of the crumbs of his table to Lazarus, but in heaven Lazarus refuses even a drop of water to moisten the lips of Dives in hell. No healthy and optimistic soul could have dreamed so prosaic a dream. The future is a place of revenge according to Jesus. Such a future as he describes, with thrones for his friends, and hell everlasting for the stranger, would, if really accepted, smite humanity with the worst kind of pessimism. We could pardon Jesus for wishing the destruction of this world, if he only offered a better one in its place.

It is in the light of this belief in a vanishing world that the teachings of Jesus should be interpreted. "If any one," says Jesus, "take away thy coat, let him take thy cloak also." Of course. Of what use is property in a world soon to be set on fire? Besides, according to the Sermon on the Mount, the way to have property in heaven is not to have any here. To Jesus, the world was like a tavern—good only for a night's lodging; or to change the simile, the world was like a sinking ship from which, to save ourselves, everything else must be

(1) Luke, VI Chap.

thrown overboard. Who would care to accumulate wealth, who would care to marry, or rear children, on a sinking ship? Could such an alarmist be a sane moral teacher? Yet, Jesus must have been sane enough to realize that the command not to resist evil,—to give to everyone that would borrow; to turn also the other cheek to the aggressor; and to let the robber bully people out of their belongings,—would upset the very foundations of human society and create a chaos unspeakably injurious to the moral life; but what is the difference if we are on a sinking ship! In the same spirit, Jesus advises his disciples to let the tares grow up with the wheat. It is not worth while trying to separate them now, the time is so short. And when he says that we must “hate father, mother, and children for his sake,” he means that to escape this great, this hastening calamity which he predicts, would be better for us than to cultivate the affections and the friendships that will soon be no more. It is really impossible for anyone believing in a heaven to be quite just to the world that now is. The other world looks so important to the believer that this one becomes, as John Wesley expressed it, “A fleeting show.”

The position of Jesus on the important question of marriage and the relation of the sexes is also to be studied in the light of the belief that the world is not going to last very long.

It certainly would be absurd to have any weddings, as it would be cruel to have children, or to accumulate property, or to acquire knowledge, in such a world. Tolstoi, in his *Kreutzer Sonata*, which is a terrible story, interprets the real Christian attitude toward marriage. He shows conclusively that it is inconsistent for a follower of Jesus to marry. Even as the believer must give up all property, he must also give up the family. If he is single, he must not marry; if he is married, he must live as though he was not married. Tolstoi proves his contention by quoting among other texts, the following from Jesus: “And everyone that hath forsaken wife or children or lands for my name’s sake”—which words are a direct recommendation to forsake kith and kin, wife and husband, in fact everything. To be a Christian, according to Count Tolstoi, is to follow the example of Jesus who abstained from marriage. What is the use of talking about divorce when marriage is forbidden? Jesus said that Moses allowed divorce

because of the hardness of men's hearts; and marriage is permitted, according to Paul, as a concession to human weakness. The Christian ideal, however, is celibacy. Jesus is very positive on this point. You will not blame me if I quote his own words, just as I find them in the New Testament. In the gospel of Matthew, chapter nineteen, verse twelve, Jesus speaks of three kinds of eunuchs: first, those who were born deformed; second, those who have been mutilated by men; and third, those "who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." This is an invitation to all who can to emasculate themselves. Is not this pernicious teaching? A man could not teach such a doctrine in America to-day without laying himself open to the contempt of his fellows, but when preached by Jesus, hypocrisy and cowardice combine to extol it as divine wisdom. Fortunately, such teaching is *admired*—not obeyed. That is as far as hypocrisy cares to go. It is owing to the healthy manhood of the occidental nations that this Asiatic superstition has not altogether bankrupted civilization. In the early centuries many of the followers of Jesus mutilated their bodies "for the kingdom of heaven's sake." There is in Russia a sect called *Skopskis*, with a membership of six thousand, which follows the practice recommended by the founder of Christianity.

The vows of *poverty*, *chastity* and *obedience*, lead practically to self-destruction. Poverty is helplessness, or nothingness; chastity is self-mortification; obedience, by which is meant, absolute surrender of the will to another, is the stamping out of the mind. Goodness! It is not only the world that Christianity wishes to destroy, but also man. Annihilation—the Buddhist Nirvana, seems to be its goal. How to make a man a mere *zero*—poor, emasculated, and a mental slave, seems to be the ideal of this Asiatic cult. After two thousand years of modern education, such is the hold of Jesus upon the Christian world, that in our churches is still sung the hymn:

"O, to be nothing, nothing!"

With this doctrine of celibacy in view, the indifference of Jesus to the rights of women as human beings is not a surprise. It has been well said that "those who trample upon manhood can have no real respect for woman." Jesus never spoke of God except as a father. If the highest principle or being in

the universe is a "he," of course woman can never hope to be on an equality with man. Motherhood will always occupy a secondary place as long as the father is a god. If God is a father, what mother can be on an equality with him? He must rule; she must obey. Women do not stop to think that religion—Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism—is the most stubborn obstacle in the path of their advancement. Jesus ignored women in all the essentials of life. He did not love any one of them sufficiently to share his life with her. He had no place for the love of woman in his heart. He kept twelve men as his constant companions. Suppose Jesus had invited some gentle and devoted woman to the honor of apostleship,—what an example that would have been! But he was not great enough to rise above the bigotry of his age. Surely, there were women in his circle of acquaintance better than Judas Iscariot, who sold him for a paltry sum of money. Women may wait upon Jesus at the table, they may give birth to him, and nurse him; they may fall at his feet to bathe them with their tears and wipe them with their tresses—but to be his apostles—not that. Had Jesus been really a great genius he would have understood that in the work of saving people, the co-operation of woman is indispensable. There are no better saviors than women. How many a husband has been saved from drink—from the gutter even, by his wife. How many sons have been shielded from a prodigal's fate by a mother's all-conquering devotion. Yet for this splendid force or agency of reform, Jesus had no appreciation whatever.

If I were hanged on the highest hill
Mother o' mine;
I know whose love would follow me still
Mother o' mine.

Jesus failed to see in woman that which inspires the poet, the painter, the hero, to do their best. He took the Asiatic view of woman. "Can man be free," sang Shelley, "if woman be a slave?" Suppose Jesus had said that!

The bible is on the whole very unfair to woman. This is a sign of its inferior morality. It is the bully who takes advantage of the physically weak. When, in the Garden of Eden, God is about to punish the first couple for their disobedience, he is much less considerate of the woman than he is of the man. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,"

is the curse for Adam. That was not a curse at all. Labor is not only honorable, it is also pleasureable. Many work who do not have to—they work, not from pressure, but from pleasure. Many who retire from business do so with regret. It is indolence that is a curse. The divine curse against the serpent is even milder. He is told to walk upon his belly for the rest of his life—a change of locomotion was his punishment. But when Jehovah curses the woman, he shows,—I was going to say,—the effect of his Asiatic training. “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”⁽¹⁾

“I will greatly multiply thy sorrow.” And why? Is it because she is stronger and can therefore endure more suffering than the man? Why should she be struck a heavier and a more crushing blow? And observe that she is cursed in the act which constitutes the greatest and most heroic service a woman renders to the human race,—the giving birth to children. The pain of child-bearing is to be henceforth, says the deity, very much more painful. Well may we blush for Jehovah. If there is a divine moment in human life, it is when a woman becomes a mother. All the tenderness, the love, the gentleness, the devotion, the sweetness, and the compassion, of which we are capable, will not be enough to outweigh the suffering a woman endures to give life and light to a new being. And think of choosing this delicate and helpless moment to strike at her! And this is the being who has sent his son to save *us*! But who shall save Jehovah?

“And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” At the threshold of life she is sold into slavery. She is not given to Adam—to share with him the dignity of humanity, the duties and rights of life,—but to be his creature. Suppose Jehovah had said: “A woman is as much a human being as a man, and because of her physical weakness, I shall charge myself to be her special protector and friend until man shall have advanced sufficiently in culture and civilization to do full justice to her.” Ah, if Jehovah had only said *that*! In the Episcopal and Catholic marriage services, to this day, the

⁽¹⁾ Genesis III:16.

wife is asked to promise to obey her husband. And this is the religion that pretends to be just and impartial to women. From the silence of Jesus on this subject, in a country and at a time when woman's condition was deplorable, and where the curse with which she had been cursed had really taken effect,—as well as from the few words he said about marriage,—Jesus shows his utter incapacity to tear himself from his Asiatic environment, or to rise to the nobler ideals of an advancing civilization.

Again, in the light of his belief in a world soon to disappear, it becomes clear why Jesus ignored such subjects, for instance, as education, art and politics. There is not a word in all the sayings and sermons of Jesus about schools, or the acquisition of knowledge of nature and its laws. He does not devote a single thought to the education of children. Not once does he denounce ignorance, which is the mother of all abominations. In the age in which he lived, ignorance was the most abundant as well as the worst crop his own country raised. And yet, Jesus had absolutely nothing to say against it. It would take time to conquer knowledge, and the time was too short. Moreover, in the world to come, such knowledge would be superfluous. What wisdom the believers needed would be given to them miraculously, even as God rained down manna in the desert to the children of Israel. This idea that everything, even our daily bread, is *given* to us, not acquired by us, explains also why Jesus ignored the subject of labor—the great transformer that transforms the world's waste places into gardens and its swamps into flourishing cities. "Consider the lilies of the fields," argues Jesus, with a suggestion of poetry in his usually severe and solemn speech,—“they toil not, neither do they spin,”—from which it is to be inferred that, if the lilies can be so fair and flourishing without toil or labor, so can man, if he will only put his trust in God.

The kingdom of heaven which is to take the place of this world when it has been burned down to ashes, is not an evolution, or a growth out of present conditions, but it is a totally different order, and is to be introduced suddenly and by miracle. This idea makes human labor unnecessary. Hence, the advice of Paul to the slave, not to seek his freedom, and that of Jesus, to let the tares grow up with the wheat. It

is not by any effort on our part; it is not by human science or labor, but by magic, that is to say, by some unknown, mysterious and sudden manner—like the thief at night, that the kingdom of God is to come.

Little things as well as great issues, Jesus would have us leave to providence. Therefore his warning: Take no thought for the morrow. In other words labor is necessary for those people only who have no Father in heaven who takes notice of even the falling sparrow. But the believer has only to cast his net into the sea and fishes with pearls in their mouths will help him pay for his wants. Faith will not only move mountains, but it can make a single loaf of bread to satisfy the hunger of thousands. In fact, a miracle-worker like Jesus could not consistently recommend labor, which means application of means to ends. Jesus was a magician. Morality is a Science.

But let us now consider Jesus' answers to special problems presented to him by many of his hearers for solution. You know the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus to ask him the way to eternal life. "Keep the ten commandments," Jesus told him. But when the youth answered that he was already doing that, Jesus said, "If thou wilt be perfect, sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." I am not surprised that the young man went away disappointed. What is there in poverty to entitle a man to eternal life? Is it not a perverse doctrine that associates beggary with moral perfection? Why should the mendicant be the pet of heaven. If you give all that you have to the poor, you will have to depend upon charity for your living,—or starve. And where will the charity come from, if all men were to follow the advice of Jesus and cultivate poverty? But wealth means life, it means enjoyment of the world and exuberance of spirits, which things Jesus dreads. Poverty means lassitude, asceticism, low vitality, prostration and weariness of life,—which things Jesus considered essential to the *destruction* of the world, which he hoped for. It is only for this world, however, that Jesus believes in poverty. In the next, his followers will receive a hundred-fold for every sacrifice made. They will be given thrones, crowns, jeweled streets to walk in—and mansions of pure gold in which they will drink

of the fruit of the vine. Heaven, in the opinion of Jesus, is like a bank which pays ten thousand per cent for every privation suffered in this world. The most pronounced commercialism even is not so extravagant as that. The heaven of Jesus is more materialistic than this world.

It is often claimed that this doctrine of Jesus was a great comfort to the unfortunate, who were given something to look forward to. If they were poor, here, they could hope to be rich there. It is true to a great extent that Christianity won its way into the hearts of the masses by flattering them. "Unto the poor the Gospel is preached," said Jesus. And what was its message to them?—You have lost this world, but the next will be yours. In my opinion this promise, while it sounds big, is a very empty one. It taught the poor to submit to oppression, instead of inspiring them to rebellion against injustice. Jesus did not tell the truth when he said that poverty, hunger, ignorance, misery, were *blessed*.

You are also familiar with the story of the men who came to Jesus to ask him whether they should pay tribute to Caesar? Instead of giving to this question a direct answer, Jesus resorts to quibbling—He asks for a coin, and when one is presented, "Whose is the superscription," he asks. "Caesar's," is the answer. "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's," commands Jesus. But one moment: Is a coin Caesar's because his superscription is upon it? Is it not rather the property of the man who has earned it by his labor? Shall Caesar claim everything that he can put his stamp upon? Was not Jesus recommending the blind worship of force when he told them to respect Caesar's name? Suppose, instead of evading the question, or attempting a *smart* answer to it, Jesus had calmly and clearly explained to them that no government, be it human or divine, is just, which is not based upon the consent of the governed. Ah, if Jesus had only said *that*.

But he also tells us to "Give unto God the things that belong to God." God and Caesar! Behold the two masters, from neither of which did Jesus deliver man. And how do we give unto God the things that belong to God? If we give it to the priests, will it reach God—and how much of it will reach him? Moreover, if we are to tell the things that belong to Caesar by the stamp upon them, how are we to tell the

things that belong to God? And how did the deity come to let Caesar in as a partner? And what will there be left for us after God and Caesar have had each his share? It is difficult to understand how the robust occidental can find any moral uplift or guidance in so whimsical a piece of advice. Jesus was asked a great question, the question of political autonomy and international law, but he gave to it a trifling answer.

Let us take another example. I have more than once called your attention to the story of the thief on the cross. There were really two of them. To one of them Jesus promised paradise. What became of the other? Both men were malefactors, but one of them believed in Jesus and became a saint at the last moment. Can anything be more immoral? Can anything be more arbitrary or fatalistic? If we wished to show that it made no difference how people lived, and that the only thing that saves is faith, which is as effective at the eleventh hour as at the first—we could not have invented a better argument than is furnished by this story in the gospels.

Observe that the man magically saved, as this malefactor was, becomes meaner and more selfish after he is converted than he was before. He imagines that God is just waiting yonder to welcome him, and that heaven is being put in order for his reception,—while his crime sinks into a mere nothing in his eyes. Like the thief on the cross, he has not a single thought of his victims—not a single pang of remorse for the suffering he has caused. Conversion has made him callous. Whether his victims are saved or damned, he does not care. All his thoughts are centered upon his own future happiness and glory. But suppose the thief on the cross had said to Jesus when the latter invited him to paradise: "But, what about my victims, Lord? The men and women and children I have ruined and sent to their doom! How can I be happy in heaven, with my victims in hell—to whom I gave no chance in the last hour to believe and be saved? Hanging on the same cross with you, Lord, has made my heart a little more tender, and has awakened my conscience. I have become a better man since I met you. Let me then go where I can atone in some real way for my crimes. Let my heaven consist in serving the people I have wronged, until we can be saved together."

If Jesus had only provoked *that* for a reply from the converted thief!

Compare with this puffed-up vanity and meanness of the malefactor converted by miracle, the glorious behavior of Othello in the presence of death. Jesus' company made the thief on the cross contemptible; Shakespeare's touch made Othello divine. As he is about to leap into the arms of death, Othello is not thinking of his soul, or of his future; his one and only thought is of his victim. He does not whine in the ears of heaven, nor does he beg to be saved from the punishment he deserves. He is no coward trying to sneak into heaven while his Desdemona lies in her blood at his feet. Listen to the words the great poet speaks by his mouth:

Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!

No vision of heaven, no thought of glory for himself, can tempt Othello to forget his crime. He prefers hell for himself as the only thing with which his awakened conscience can be calmed. That is the way to be converted!

The Christian doctrine of forgiveness is the doctrine of license. Jesus commands us to forgive "seventy times seven." He does not seem to realize that the more accommodating we are to the criminal, the more we sap the foundations of morality. "Judge not," says Jesus, "that ye be not judged." That is very queer advice. We are not to see wrong or crime in others lest they should find the same in us. It is the religion of a guilty conscience—which abstains from criticising lest his own faults should be exposed. "You say nothing about me and I'll agree to say nothing about you," is a conspiracy to defeat justice. "For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged," continues Jesus. Not at all. If a man has slandered you, must you slander him? If you have been robbed, must you rob in return? Do you have to judge another with the same prejudice, bigotry and malice with which he judges you? And must you refrain from passing any righteous judgments from fear of being misjudged or misunderstood by the world? Were we to follow this false teaching, we would be giving crime a free sway,—with every tongue tied against it.

But did not Jesus say "Love one another," and is not that enough? If it were enough, the past twenty centuries would have been centuries of peace and brotherhood. Instead, they have been centuries of war and persecution. The world is in need of a Jesus who can *make* people love. If Jesus has this power—why is Europe still armed to the teeth? I do not deny the good intentions of Jesus. I question his *power*. He has not even succeeded in making his own followers, Catholics and Protestants, to love one another. Christianity has had a good, long chance to show results. A religion which is split up into an ever-increasing number of sects is not going to bring about unity and brotherhood. "He that believeth not shall be damned," and "depart from me ye cursed," takes from the rose of love both petals and perfume, and leaves only the thorns.

But Jesus also said "Love your enemies." The advice of Confucius to "love our benefactors and to be just to our enemies," is more sensible. It is neither practical nor desirable to love one's enemies. Can we love the slanderer, the oppressor, the murderer? If our "enemy" is not all this, he is not an enemy. But we can be just to the people who are mean, deceitful, spiteful or pitiless toward us. Did Jesus love his enemies? Why then was not Judas saved? And why did he say to his disciples that for the people who rejected them there awaited the awful fate of Sodom and Gomorrah?

But did not Jesus pray for his murderers on the cross? Was his prayer answered? If there is any truth in history, the Jews have suffered for their supposed participation in the tragedy of Calvary more than words can describe. I have always thought that the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," was put in Jesus' mouth, at the last moment, for a theatrical effect. If the atonement was one of the eternal decrees of God, the people who put Jesus to death were only carrying it out. If, however, knowing that Jesus was a God, they, nevertheless, wanted to kill him, they must have been imbeciles to suppose a God could be murdered safely; but if they did not know the truth and committed the crime ignorantly, they were not forgiven for it, and the bible describes the fearful punishment prepared for them.

Another much commended saying of Jesus is the following: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me." This has been interpreted as a command to help and succor even the poorest of the poor. I admire the thought. I applaud the generosity. But would it not have been grander, if Jesus, instead of saying, "ye have done it unto me," had said, "ye have done it unto Humanity." "For my sake" is not so large and noble as "for Humanity's sake." One of my neighbor preachers said the other day that he loved the poor and the lost "because Jesus loved them." Then, it was *Jesus* he loved, and not his fellows. Evidently he would not love them, if Jesus did not. What would become of this preacher's interest in his fellowmen, should he ever lose his faith in Christ? That explains why people often say that without religion there can be no morality. We desire a morality that can outlive all the gods. Christ or no Christ,—can we still be kind and just and compassionate toward the weak and the unfortunate?

"If you take Jesus Christ out of the world, the world's a carcass, and man's a disaster," cries the preacher at the top of his voice. Of course. If everything is to be done for Jesus' sake, what will become of morality, civilization or humanity with Jesus dropped out? We need no better excuse for summoning all our energies to combat a religion that commits the destinies of our world to the keeping of one man,—and he, in all probability,—a myth.⁽¹⁾

Let us recapitulate: Jesus taught a magical, not a scientific morality. It was by being born of "water and the Holy Ghost," whatever that might mean, and not by intellectual and moral effort, that people were to be saved. He placed the creed above the deed, and himself above humanity. "Believe in me, do good for my sake," gives to morality a sectarian stamp, or taint, which is bound to corrupt it. Morality is born of liberty. Christianity is the religion of absolutism, in which Jesus or God is everything, and man a mere puppet. Christianity denies to man the right to reason. He must only obey. There is no morality where there is no liberty. By his doctrine of an impending catastrophe, a future hell, and by his promises of fabulous wealth and glory beyond—Jesus helped to disturb and distort the judgment of the weak and the fear-

ful, preventing thereby the cultivation of sane thoughts of life. The morality of Jesus was the morality of panic.

And what do we offer in place of supernaturalism, whether it be Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, Brahmanism, or any other "ism"? In place of magic or miracle, we offer science; in place of "belief," we offer knowledge—the open light of day and the unhampered interchange of human love and thought. In place of Christ or God—both absent, and neither dependent upon anything we can do for him—we offer Humanity, forever at our side, and in daily need of our bravest service and most unstinted love.

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